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Comparative View of the Money-Rate of WAGES in GLASGOW and the West of Scotland, in 1851, 1856, and 1858. By JOHN STRANG, LL.D.

[Read before Section (F,) Economic Science and Statistics, of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at Leeds, on 25th September, 1858.]

It may perhaps be in the recollection of certain Members of the Economic Section of the British Association, that at the meeting held in Cheltenham in 1856, I had the honour of submitting a Paper on the Money-Rate of Wages of Labour in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, the result of which was, that during the five or six years preceding 1856 a gradual and permanent rise appeared to have been established in *all Wages* connected with the leading industries of Glasgow, and that, too, notwithstanding a great reduction made in the hours of labour.

Under the altered circumstances of the country, occasioned by the late Monetary Crisis, the important question now arises, whether or not this gradual and progressive rise in the Money-Rate of Wages has been arrested and reversed, and if so, to what extent?

With a view of, in some degree, solving this question and continuing our chronicle of the labour value of the West of Scotland, I have again made inquiries into this matter, and have selected from the long list of mechanics, handicraftsmen, and labourers, a few of those who are engaged on the production of the great staples which belong to that district, premising that the following facts in general are based as formerly stated on Returns made to me by some of the leading Manufacturers, Engineers, Ironmasters, and Builders of Glasgow and surrounding District, and that they are not general Estimates, but are founded on the Wages' Books of the several Concerns to which they apply.

We begin with the Cotton Spinners, Power-loom Weavers, and other workers in the Factories in the West of Scotland, of which Glasgow is the central mart, and whose numbers cannot be less than 30,000. It appears that the average rate of Wages paid to such persons in 1851, 1856, and 1858, were as given in Table (A.)

From the following Table (A) it appears that the Wages of the Factory Workers have been considerably increased since 1851—that they reached their maximum in 1856—and that since the panic at the close of 1857, they have fallen nearly 20 per cent. It must be remembered, however, that although the sums gained by Workers have been, during these seven years, much increased, and are even now more than they were in 1851, still the real cost of the manual labour in the work done is greatly diminished. The truth is, the

increase has been obtained altogether through the improvements in machinery and in the art of manufacturing, and as these improvements are still in progress it is more than probable that the hands, being now chiefly on piece-work, will gain ere long as high Wages as ever they did.

(A.) *Wages—COTTON TRADE—West of Scotland—Weekly Rates.*

Occupation.	1851.		1856.		1858.	
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Power-loom Weavers ...	8	9	10	9	9	9
Spinners	25	—	30	—	27	—
Winders	8	—	9	—	9	—
Warpers	12	—	17	—	16	6
Dressers	32	—	40	—	35	—
Tenters	30	—	40	—	38	—
Twisters	9	—	12	—	12	—
Mechanics	24	—	27	—	26	—
Labourers	12	—	17	—	15	—

Following the course pursued in our former Paper, let us next note the Wages of two of the most important Industries of the West of Scotland, I mean the comparative rates paid to those employed in Mines and Iron Works, whose numbers in the year 1854-5 amounted to 32,900, and whose united Wages during those twelvemonths reached the large sum of 1,976,000*l.*

(B.) *Average Daily Rate of MINING LABOUR from 1852-58.*

Occupation.	1852.	1854.	1856.	1858.
	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>
Miners	2 6	5 —	5 —	3 —

(C.) *Average Daily Rate of Wages paid to Workmen connected with the Manufacture of PIG AND MALLEABLE IRON, 1852-58.*

Occupation.	1852.	1854.	1856.	1858.
	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i> <i>d.</i>
Blast Furnace-keepers	5 —	6 8	7 9	5 —
Do. Assistants	3 2	4 2	4 2	3 3
Do. Fillers	2 8	3 10	4 2	3 9
Puddlers, including under } hands	7 6	10 6	10 —	9 —
Rollers (Chief Rollers).....	10 —	14 6	13 6	12 —
Labourers	1 6	2 1	2 —	2 —

From the foregoing Tables it appears that while there was a gradual and important rise from 1852 to 1856 in the Wages of those employed in the Coal and Iron Mines as well as of those employed in the manufacture of pig and malleable iron, there is a marked diminution in the Wages of all employed in these industries in 1858, with the exception of the labourers or unskilled workmen. This fall of Wages followed almost immediately on the Commercial Crisis of 1857; but it will be observed, that although the reduction is great, the rate even now is considerably higher than in 1852.

The third industry in our list to which we would call attention is the Wages of Engineers and Mechanics, a very large class of workers in Glasgow and its neighbourhood. The following is the average rate of these per day of ten hours during the last eight years :

(D.) *Average Daily Wages—ENGINEERS AND MECHANICS—1851-58.*

	Shillings.		Shillings.
1851	3·43	1855	3·99
1852	3·52	1856	4·
1853	3·82	1857	3·97
1854	3·97	1858	3·92

Here again it will be found that up to 1857, Engineers' and Mechanics' Wages gradually advanced, but since that period they have diminished, though still above those of 1851.

The fourth industry we would next mention is that of Building or House Construction. Considering the mighty advance which Glasgow has made during the last ten years in its population, and the necessary increase in the number of its habitations and places of business, it is easy to conceive how very large the employment must have been, and still is, of those engaged in this business. Among the many handicraftsmen employed in the construction of Houses, Warehouses, Factories, and other buildings, we shall as formerly limit ourselves to Stone Quarriers, Masons, Carpenters, and Labourers.

The following is the rate of Wages paid to *Quarriers* from 1851 to 1858 for 60 hours' work.

(E.) *Average Weekly Wages—QUARRIERS—1851-58.*

	Shillings.		Shillings.
1851	14 per week.	1855	20 per week.
1852	16 „	1856	22 „
1853	17 „	1857	22 „
1854	19 „	1858	19 to 20 „

This Table shows a fall of fully 2s. since 1857.

The following is the average rate paid to Masons from 1850 to 1856.

(F.) *Average Weekly Wages*—Masons—1851-56 and 56-58.

	s.	d.		s.	d.
During the Summer of 1850 } and 1851	21	-	During the Summer of 1853	23	9
„ Winter of do.	18	-	„ „ 1854	25	-
„ Summer of 1852 { and	21	-	„ „ 1855	25	-
„ „ 18	18	-	„ „ 1856	25	-

In September, 1856, an addition was made for Masons and the rate fixed per hour as follows :

	Per Hour.	Per Week of 57 Hrs.
	d.	£ s. d.
Sept. 19th, 1856	5½	1 6 1½
Dec. 12th, „	5½	1 4 11
May 15th, 1857	5	1 3 9
July 24th, „	5½	1 4 11
Aug. 7th, „	5½	1 6 1½
Nov. 6th, „	5	1 3 9
March 1st, 1858	4¾	1 2 6½
Aug. 1st, „	4¾	1 2 6½

When these Wages are contrasted with those of 1856 it will be found that there has been a diminution on Masons' Wages of 3s. 6d. per week.

The following is the rate of Wages paid to Carpenters and Joiners from 1851 till 1858.

(G.) *Average Weekly Wages*—CARPENTERS—1851-58.

Shillings.		Shillings.
1851 21	per week of 60 hours.	1855 24 per week of 57 hrs.
1852 22	„ „	1856 24 „ „
1853 23	„ „	1857 till Nov. 26 „ „
1854 24	„ 57 hours.	1858 24 „ „

From the foregoing statement it appears that since 1856 there has been no change of Joiners' Wages, although during the interval they rose to 26s. per week. This rise continued from 20th March, 1857, when a strike took place, till 13th November, 1857, the period of the Commercial Crisis. The rate falling from 5½d. per hour to 5d., at which the Wages remain, with this addition, that if the men work before 6 o'clock in the morning, or in the evening after that hour, they receive 7½d. per hour for the additional time they labour.

The following is the rate paid to Common Labourers connected with all matters of House Construction.

(H.) *Average Weekly Wages*—COMMON LABOURERS—1850-53.

s.	d.	
1850, '51, and '52.....	12	- per week of 57 hours.
1853	14	- „ „
1854, '55, and '56.....	17	- „ „
1857	16	- „ „
1858	15	9

The fall on Unskilled Labour since the panic has only been 3*d.* per week, while the present rates when compared with what was paid from 1850 to 1853 shows an increase of 3*s.* 9*d.* per week. These labourers are almost exclusively Irish, a circumstance which at once explains this great, and, we may almost add, permanent rise. It may be here remarked, however, that there are considerably fewer labourers employed at the present time than there were in 1856, and in a few months more there will be fewer still. The fact is, that the numbers wanted during the late excessive and uncalled-for speculation in building have been checked by the failure of the Builders, who having no capital but what they could obtain on mortgage, have by building, no doubt, benefited the landowners and the mortgagees to the extent of securing the ground rents of the one and the interest of the other; but have ruined themselves, and left their poor creditors, the Masons, Carpenters, Plasterers, &c., in the lurch.

Let us now in conclusion turn to the Hand-loom Weavers, of all workmen the least remunerated for their labour. In our last Paper we showed, from the facility with which this art can be learned, the numbers which unfortunately rushed to this work frequently creating an equal competition between the father and the child, coupled with the competition of Power-loom labour that a progressive fall had taken place from 1825 to 1851, when a slight revulsion took place that raised the average rate from 5*s.* 8*d.* per week in 1851, to 7*s.* 1*d.* in 1856. But even this pitiful payment has been affected since that period, as the following Table of Average Wages for the commonest plain work will best illustrate:—

(I.) *Average Weekly Wages—HAND-LOOM WEAVERS—1851-58.*

<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>		<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	
1851	5	8 { per week for men, boys, and girls.	1856	7	1 { per week for men, boys, and girls.
1852	6	9 " "	1857	6	4 " "
1853	7	- " "	1858	5	9 " "

When we examine, however, into the Wages obtained by the Hand-loom Weavers of coloured and fancy work, we find the Wages better. The fall from 1856 to 1858, even at this work, has been proportionally greater; for example:—

	1856.			1858.	
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>		<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Cotton Fabrics.....	9	3 per week.	7	9 per week.
Mixed Fancy Dress Fabrics....	14	- „	10	- „

It is gratifying to state, that during the last few years there has been a gradual diminution of Hand-loom Weavers in the West of Scotland, and from the fact of the Army and the Militia having lately drawn off so many of them from the North of Ireland, who

were formerly employed by Glasgow Manufacturers, the number is now so low as to make it certain that on the least extra demand for Hand-loom Weavers a rise on the rate of Wages must inevitably take place.

From the foregoing statements and figures it seems quite plain, that when the money rate of Wages in 1856 is compared with that of 1858, a considerable fall will be found to have taken place in all the leading Industries of the West of Scotland; and yet, if this comparison be carried back to 1851, it will also be found that the rate even since that period has risen. In short, it appears probable that the present reduction, though striking, is exceptional, and that the gradual rise, which previous to 1857 had taken place in all kinds of labour, will ere long return. There is one thing, however, quite certain, that while the present money-rate of Wages is lower than it was in 1855 and '56, the articles for every day subsistence are also lower; in short, if the labour even now given in money be measured in bread, it will be found that the workman's real position is little altered. In 1856 the average price of a Quarter of Wheat throughout England and Wales was 72*s.* 3*d.*, whereas in 1858 it is only 44*s.* 1*d.*, while the prices of Beef and Mutton were at Leadenhall Market in 1856, respectively, 5½*d.* and 6*d.* per pound, they were in 1858 5½*d.* and 5½*d.* per lb. In Glasgow the average price of Wheat, 240 lbs, was 36*s.*, and of Flour per barrel, 35*s.*, in 1856; whereas at present the former is 22*s.* and the latter 22*s.* 3*d.*

In one word, were we to draw out a Comparative Table illustrating the Prices of the chief articles of consumption which enter into the domestic economy of the artisan and labourer, and contrast them with the Money-Rate of Wages in 1856 and 1858, it would then be seen that the prudent and frugal workmen ought not to be in much worse circumstances now than they were when their wages were higher. As, however, we believe in the axiom laid down by McCulloch, in his valuable treatise on Wages and Labour, "that no country can be flourishing where Wages are low, and none long depressed when they are high," it is our hope that the check given to the rise on Wages at the close of 1857 will be only temporary, and that by improved machinery, lessened cost of production, and more extensive consumption over the world and at home for our great staples, the condition and comfort of the industrious workman may be gradually and permanently raised.
